

# How Children Learn

by Elaine Lindsey

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One of the most important truths about students is that they are created in God's image. In Genesis 1:26 we read, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

## What does it mean to be created in God's image?

Part of it involves our abilities to learn, our talents, our skills and our preferences; our differences. Every child is created to be unique and valuable. One of the roles of a Christian teacher is to assist students in seeing themselves as being created in God's image.

Educators, beginning in the 1980's, have referred to this unique difference within children as learning styles or multiple intelligences. For this article we will focus on learning styles.

## Three major learning styles

Learning styles are simply different approaches or ways of learning. The most common learning style concept is based on the work of Barbe and Swassing (1979). They defined three major learning styles:

- Visual – learn through seeing
- Auditory – learn through listening
- Kinesthetic - learn through moving, doing and touching

As created beings having the image of God, we all possess each of the learning styles. However, as individuals we tend to express one most dominantly and it quickly becomes our favored way to learn. This is also true of teachers who may use their dominant style to instruct. The challenge comes when the teaching style and the learning style are so different and so dominantly used that learning is impeded.

Teachers have to be taught the various strategies that can be used to enable all children to learn. Then teachers have to learn how to incorporate these within lessons. Next, teachers have to look at their content and see what strategies are best for that concept. Finally, teachers need to determine how they can meet the various styles of an entire class. This process is a major undertaking and requires the wisdom of God. An effective educational program will incorporate professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to continue to grow in each of the teaching styles.

## Determining Learning Styles

**Visual learners** need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom

to avoid visual distractions. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including: diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs. During a lecture or classroom discussion, visual learners often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.

**Auditory learners** do best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.

**Kinesthetic learners** do best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

### **What role can parents play?**

It is necessary to know each child to have any possibility of finding out his or her learning style. Developing relationships are essential to enabling students to learn. Intentionality in the student/teacher ratio and overall smaller student body helps to facilitate this. Parents can often provide key insight into their child's best learning style. This is why it is important that there is a close partnership between parents and teachers.

While you are partnering with your child's teacher, here are some proactive steps you can take:

- Take an active role in daily school activities
- Be sure to look at each syllabus or course description with an eye towards whether a variety of strategies to reach the learning style of your child are being used such as projects, group activities, videos, class presentations, worksheets and written tests
- Use a variety of methods yourself in assisting with homework and test review
- Recognize that if you have several children that what worked with one may not work with another
- Consider discussing the topic of learning styles with the teacher at your next parent/teacher conference

One of the benefits of Christian education is that we are challenged to have the mind of Christ – teachers, students and parents alike. In doing so, we come closer to reaching our full potential and thus, comprehending how we are made in His image.

**Resources:**

*The Way They Learn by Cynthia Tobias.* The learning-styles expert gives parents a better understanding of the types of learning approaches that will help their children do better in school.

*Every Child Can Succeed: Making the Most of Your Child's Learning Style by Cynthia Tobias.* This enlightening source shows parents how to utilize a "learning styles" approach to help their kids live up to their potential and find success in life.

**About the author...**Elaine Lindsey has served as Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Ben Lippen School, in Columbia, SC for the past five years but has served BLS for the past twenty-four years. In years past, she has taught Biology, Chemistry and Physics. She also serves as the Director of the M.Ed. program in the Graduate School at Columbia International University.

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